Bluebeard Gothic: *Jane Eyre* and Its Progeny, by Heta Pyrhönen; pp. viii + 277. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010, $65.00, £42.00.

When Charlotte Brontë had Jane Eyre compare a passageway in Thornfield to "a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle" (*Jane Eyre* [Norton, 2001], 91), she opened the path of intertextual inquiry that *Bluebeard Gothic* pursues. As Heta Pyrhönen says, readers of *Jane Eyre* (1847) who know the Bluebeard story and its variants will recognize basic correspondences: a powerful rich man with a fresh young companion, a locked chamber that conceals his shocking secret, the exposure of his criminality, and the

heroine's post-revelation escape. Pyrhönen's study, however, goes far beyond these basics. The two narratives interact complexly, she argues, and in ways that have gone unperceived; furthermore, "the master trope of *Jane Eyre* as Bluebeard Gothic" continues to inform the fictions of female authors in manifold ways (10). After laying out her project in the introduction, Pyrhönen devotes a first chapter to aspects of *Jane Eyre* as a Bluebeard story and four additional chapters to the permutations of these intermingled narratives, examining texts that span three centuries. Her approach is predominantly psychoanalytic, drawing heavily on the theories of Jacques Lacan and his followers and on Sigmund Freud's ideas about identity formation.

For Pyrhönen, Jane is not the rebel who successfully channels her rage but instead a hysteric (in the sense that she is "vexed by the question whether she is a man or a woman" [238]) who transforms her "psychic anguish" into "somatic symptoms." Her body, having absorbed "impressions whose significance she must not probe openly . . . , speaks for and in spite of her, articulating her desires through dreams, melancholy, fits of anxious excitation, and absences of consciousness" (21). First orphaned and then bereft of her surrogate father, "Jane has within her psyche a crypt-like space comparable to Bluebeard's vault: it is a traumatic, forbidden region" (23). Her incarceration in the red room marks the onset of her hysteria. Aunt Reed, "the irrational maternal superego" (27), has usurped the place of that symbolic but now degraded father, which leads to identity confusion and to fantasies of origin, as when Jane enters physical spaces with similar configurations of furniture. Thus the bed on which Uncle Reed died becomes "the seat of obscene enjoyment" (39), replicated in such later episodes as the rescue of Rochester from his burning bed. Rochester has a parallel red room experience, but his "scene of trauma" occurs in Jamaica, leading to a "castration fantasy" that he contests by flouting patriarchal law (32). Jane works through her hysteria by "mer[ging] with Bertha in Bluebeard's chamber" (46); then, by drawing on "what Lacan calls the discourse of the master" (53), she engages the reader "in a complicit bond" and so secures her own identity (54), even though "the hysteric's questioning voice" is not entirely effaced (56).

A brief review cannot convey the intricacies of this argument or the multiple psychiatric and folkloric sources on which Pyrhönen draws. Even a truncated sample suggests, however, that readers indisposed to such theories will find this hysteric Jane implausible. That said, Pyrhönen draws thought-provoking parallels to the Bluebeard story. She shows in detail how both narratives link physical spaces to mental states, and she points up correspondences undetected by earlier critics. For instance, where the fairy-tale husband gives his wife a physical key to his secret chamber, Rochester gives Jane a recalcitrant human key, Grace Poole. Brontë also revises the endings of the tales in the Bluebeard cycle: in them, either the master is killed and the heroine marries a better man, or she marries a master cleared of suspicion. In contrast, Jane marries the guilty Rochester, but after retribution and repentance.

The ensuing chapters are less Lacanian but still apply psychoanalytic, narratological, and feminist approaches to a range of adaptations. In chapter 2, Pyrhönen considers three narratives that pick up on the witnessing aspect of *Jane Eyre* and the Bluebeard tale cycle, explaining their dynamics in terms of trauma theory. Narrating enables the protagonist to make sense of her traumatic experience and share it; her recovery requires an empathic audience that nonetheless maintains enough critical

distance for catharsis. Pyrhönen's reading of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and especially her comparison of Rhys's Rochester to Brontë's, puts this theory to effective use. In chapter 3, she considers the masochism and perversity of four Bluebeard-based romances. For example, in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), the nameless second wife takes the path Jane rejected by following Maxim de Winter into exile. Her Bluebeard, however, is a masochist, and her discovery of his secret, the murder of his first wife, not only turns her into an accomplice but also "fuses her with the mother figure of the masochistic fantasy" (129). To Pyrhönen the second Mrs. De Winter is "Max's externalized superego" (130), homosexually attracted to Rebecca and destructively enclosed with Max "in Bluebeard's repetitious circuit" (135). There is no suggestion that she becomes her traumatized husband's protector. A fourth chapter considers two novels that expand on religious issues implicit in *Jane Eyre* and the Bluebeard Gothic. Here the emphasis is on fantasies of origin, scapegoating, and sacrifice. A fifth chapter, which draws principally on Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence theory, investigates the ways in which Angela Carter's Bluebeard stories upend their predecessors. A brief conclusion highlights Pyrhönen's key points about these adaptations.

For readers curious to know what has been done in *Jane Eyre*'s name and unaware of the twists and turns of the Bluebeard Gothic, this book is certainly revelatory. As Pyrhönen says, she has signposted it throughout by explaining more than once what she will argue and then repeating what she has demonstrated. Reiteration, however, cannot eradicate questions about her radical reconception of Brontë's much-interpreted protagonist or the partiality of subsequent readings: in her eagerness to demonstrate her own hypothesis, how many aspects of these texts does she ignore? Pyrhönen frequently refers to Maria Tatar's *Secrets beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and his Wives* (2004). One wishes that *Bluebeard Gothic* had been written with similar clarity.

Sue Lonoff
Cambridge, MA

Copyright of Victorian Studies is the property of Indiana University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.